

A
S E R M O N

Preached in the
Parish Church of *Saint Ives*,
In the County of *Huntington*,

O N
Wednesday, December 18, 1745;

The Day appointed for
A PUBLIC FAST:

BY
MANISON WARNER, A.M.
Vicar of the said Parish,
And late Fellow of *Jesus Coll. Cambridge*.

CAMBRIDGE,
Printed by J. BENTHAM Printer to the University.

A
SERMON

Preached in the
South Church of Saint Asaph
in the County of Alington

ON
Wednesday, December 13, 1745

The Day appointed for
A PUBLIC FAST;

BY
MANISON WARREN, A.M.
Vicar of the Church of Saint Asaph
And the Fellow of the University of Cambridge

LONDON:
Printed by J. BARNARD, in Strand, near the Temple

JOEL ii. 12, 13.

*Therefore also now, saith the Lord,
Turn ye even to me with all your
heart, and with fasting, and with
weeping, and with mourning.*

*And rend your heart, and not your
garments, and turn unto the Lord
your God: for he is gracious and
merciful, slow to anger, and of
great kindness, and repenteth him
of the evil.*

THE Prophet had been reminding
the people of, and pressing them to
give heed and attend to the many sore ca-
lamities they had been visited withal; and
denouncing still greater, and more grievous
judgments, just ready to overtake, or be in-
flicted upon them, as by other means, so par-
ticularly by a dreadful *invasion* and destruc-
tion

tion from the *Chaldeans*: and from a just *sense* of what they had *felt*, and the terrible *apprehensions* of what was *likely* to *follow*, he calls upon, and exhorts all ranks and degrees of men amongst them, to try what might be done by a general and *solemn humiliation*, — by a *heartly* and *thorough reformation*.

“ Sanctify a fast ; call a solemn assembly ;
 “ gather the elders, and all the inhabitants
 “ of the land, into the house of the Lord
 “ your God : and cry unto the Lord, Alas !
 “ for the day ; for the day of the Lord is
 “ at hand : and as a destruction from the
 “ Almighty shall it come.” — Therefore,
 for this reason then, even *now*, or *instantly*,
 “ turn ye unto me, saith the Lord, with all
 “ your heart, — with fasting, and with
 “ weeping and with mourning.” But let
 your *inward* sentiments of grief *keep pace*
with, if not *exceed* the *outward* expressions
 of it. Rend your *hearts*, rather or *more* than
 your *garments* : and turn unto the Lord
 your God. For he is gracious or bountiful ;
 merciful or compassionate ; *backward* or *slow*
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to *resent* or punish; *ample* and *boundless* in *kindness* and beneficence; *ready* and *swift* to *forgive*, and *avert* his threaten'd and impending *judgments upon men's repentance*. —

Who then can tell what a hearty and thorough reformation may do for us? who knows but it may prevent the calamities, ready to befall and overwhelm us, and render the Deity propitious to us? so that instead of the horrors and miseries of *sword* and *famine*, we may happily experience the blessings of *peace* and *plenty*.

Public fastings and humiliations have been *common* in almost *all* ages and nations of the world, when any judgments or calamities were *felt* or *feared*: but withal they have *at times* been so *shamefully abused*, — made such solemn grimace, — such mere external performances; and had recourse to in order to *sanctify* — to reconcile people to, and engage them to support such *abominable wickedness*, that they have grown greatly into *disrepute*; and are become ridiculous and contemptible to *many*, suspicious to *most*.

We have *just now* been reminded of people in *Isaiah's* days, who pretended by their external deportment to *seek* God daily; to delight to know his ways, and find pleasure in making approaches to him: — who could put on the most solemn shews of grief and repentance; would afflict themselves *grievously*, so far as abstaining rigorously from food went, — would bow down their heads as bulrushes, and spread sackcloth and ashes under them, — and yet made no steps towards reformation; but continued to follow their *own* inclination in *private*: who were so far from using their brethren *equitably* and *kindly*, as God required; that they were *rigorous* and *cruel* in their *exactions* and *treatment* of them: who, instead of loosing the bands of wickedness — undoing the heavy burdens — setting at liberty the oppressed, and breaking every yoke; — instead of dealing out their bread to the hungry, receiving the destitute poor into their houses, and clothing such, as they found naked; would inhumanly *bide* themselves, — shut their *eyes*, their *ears*, their *hearts* against their

own flesh ; — cruelly exact their money of their *insolvent* debtors, and treat *them* and their *slaves*, who ought at *such* seasons to have been set at liberty, with the most *contemptuous* and *cruel* usage ; — who fasted for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness or *cruelty*, and make their voice to be heard on high.

The *Scribes* and *Pharisees* likewise made use of *frequent* and *long* fasts and prayers to enable them the *better* — the more *effectually* and *securely* withal, to devour widows houses.

And these solemnities have *often*, since their time, been abused to the *very basest* of purposes ; and perhaps never *more notoriously*, and *scandalously*, than in *this* Nation of ours, about a century ago.

But the *abuse* of a thing is by no means a good reason for the *disuse* of it. For perhaps there is nothing *good*, but what has been abused. And we must shake hands with *reason*, with *religion*, with the *Holy Scriptures* ; if we will lay aside every thing that has been used to ill purposes. For there are

none

none of these, but have been *grievously perverted* and abused *at times*.

These public solemnities of fasting and humiliation, tho' often abused, are wont, when *rightly* performed, to have a very happy and salutary effect.

We read of *Abab* that having been re-proved by the Prophet, and had the divine judgments denounced against him; he rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth, and fasted and went softly. And the *event* of it was this. "Seest thou how *Abab* humbleth himself before me? — *because* he humbleth himself before me; I will not bring the evil threatened against his house in *his* days."

The people of *Nineveh* likewise, hearing of the judgments threaten'd against them; proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least, and sat in ashes, and cried mightily unto God: — and, *turning* from their *evil* ways, and the violence in their hands; they preserv'd *themselves* and their *city* from ruin and destruction. — God saw their works, that they
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turned from their evil ways; and he repented of the evil threatened against them for their *impenitence*; and he *did it not*.

Thus again *Jehosaphat*, about to be assaulted by powerful enemies, set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all *Judab*; acknowledging his want of power to withstand such forces, and reposing his trust and confidence in the Almighty *alone* for defence and deliverance: and the *next* thing we read is, that his enemies were made to turn their swords against *one another*; and that the *defeat* was so *entire*, and *cheap* withal, that he had nothing to do, but to take the spoil of his *but just now* dreadful and formidable enemies.

And indeed such solemnities as these rightly performed seem *always* to promise a *happy issue* or event.

War is a solemn appeal to the great King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. And as he *always* approves and favours, and will most certainly at *one time or other* reward virtue and discountenance or punish vice; and as it is reasonable to presume that *communities*
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or kingdoms will have no place, but on *this* side the grave; it has generally been thought that a *righteous* cause is never suffered to be *finally* oppressed in war; unless it be by way of punishment for the wickedness of those who are *engaged* in it, or *employed* to defend it.

If it be not *certain* that matters are *always* thus; 'tis at least *highly probable* that they are *generally*, or for the *most part* so. And therefore fasting and humiliation seem *highly proper* and expedient in a state of war; since, rightly performed, they *tend* to and effect a *reformation* of life and manners; thus render the Deity *propitious*; and of course, bid fair for *success* and victory to all arms and endeavours, used in defence of a *good* cause.

Christians indeed don't seem under any solemn and *express* obligation to *public* fasting or humiliation: they are required to *shun ostentation* and shew, as much as may be, and to perform, as *other* parts of their duty, so particularly that of fasting as *privately* as possible; and purely with a view
to

to obey and approve their behaviour to the great *searcher of hearts* ; who will not fail *amply* and *openly* to reward all such, as have made it their sincere study and endeavor to serve and obey him.

Besides the fasting required of Christians seems to be not abstaining from food a *day* or two upon some *extraordinary* occasions ; but such a temperate and *abstemious* course of life, as may *bring* and *keep* the *body* under *strict subjection* to the *mind* ; draw men off from worldly and sensual enjoyments ; fit and dispose them for religious and spiritual exercises ; and bring them *at length* to walk *by faith*, and *not by sight*.

But still as *all* ranks of men amongst them are required to be *subject* to the *higher powers*, —to submit themselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake ; their *knowledge* must be but *little*, or their *perverse*ness great, if they refuse to obey in a matter not in itself *indifferent* only ; but, rightly performed at least, highly conducive to the interests of *piety* and *virtue* ; to the benefit of their *King* and *Country*, and to the *present* improvement

and *final* reward of *themselves*. — And indeed were it only a means of their *own* reformation, it ought gladly to be embraced and improved.

All Christians have *sins* to condemn, to bewail, to oppose, to repent of, to forsake: have *virtues* to labour after, to acquire, or improve in. And *fasting* has a *direct tendency* to these great and good purposes; — as it is an act of resentment and displeasure against ourselves for *past* miscarriages; a motive to watchfulness and care for the *future*; stops up, for a time at least, the fountain-head of most disorders, our bodily appetites; and furnishes both *leisure* and *relish* for religious and *spiritual* employments.

To *join* sincerely and devoutly in *this* day's solemnity is certainly our *duty* then: but *how* to do this *acceptably* is the *difficulty*, and *ought* to be our *inquiry* and *care*.

To *abstain from food* till after the *public* offices are *over*; tho' a part, is certainly *the most inconsiderable* part of the business.

The *leisure* we gain by *fasting* is to be carefully spent in religious exercises. The
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state of our souls is to be nicely looked into, our several miscarriages found out, lamented, resolved, and prayed against: and schemes for effectually opposing and correcting them laid down and fixed upon; and honestly, and with vigour and constancy prosecuted, as occasions offer, and circumstances require: — and the pardon of them, together with grace to withstand them for the future, humbly and earnestly importuned, and not doubted of, thro' the *mercy* of God, and the all-sufficient *merits* of our Redeemer.

The offices that more immediately regard *ourselves* thus dispatched; the miseries, the wants, and necessities of our *neighbours* require our regard and relief.

Alms-giving or bounty to the poor has always been look'd upon, as a necessary ingredient of an acceptable fast. Not only I suppose because we are at *such* seasons *more sensible* what the necessitous suffer, and have it in our power in some degree to help them without any extraordinary expence, — by bestowing upon them what would other-

wife have been laid out upon ourselves: but because *most* people are *sparing to a fault* in this respect; — are so wholly taken up in gratifying their *own* wants and inclinations, as far as they are able, that they are well nigh *insensible* to the miseries of their brethren; and so far perhaps from *lessening* or removing them, that they *increase*, or add to the weight of them by their *irregular* behaviour; — by seeking and endeavouring to gratify their own appetites *at all* events, and without any the least regard to *their neighbours*, — equally desirous of happiness with themselves; and whom it is their duty to treat *equitably*, to love as *brethren*, as *members* of their *own* body, in obedience to the *common* parent of mankind. — When then we are humbling ourselves for our sins; that which seems to have place in *most* people, and withal to be the *chief* source of them, an *over great* regard to *our own* ease and happiness, and a proportional disregard of what *others* feel and suffer, ought to be *first* in our notice; and before all others corrected and counteracted.

To suggest *some* things that may possibly *escape*, and which yet seem to *deserve* our observation and correction, may one would presume, if it wants it, readily have your excuse.

To bring men off from *vicious* practices, seems to be the greatest kindness that *can* be done them: and consequently to *attempt* this *may* proceed from a humane and benevolent principle. It should be remembered too 'tis a clergyman's *duty* to cry aloud and spare not; *plainly* to remind his people of their sins, to prevent the guilt of them from falling upon his own head. — But though to *correct* vice be humane and highly becoming a man, a christian, and a clergyman, to *expose* the vicious *person* is mean, ungenerous, and at times inhuman too.

Give me leave to say then, that this is probably much oftener *thought* to be *done*, than *designed*. To condemn a man for this, without good grounds, is exceedingly *unequitable*; but much more *injurious* to the party so judging; as depriving him of that benefit, he

he might otherwise have received from what he heard.

If any thing of this sort should ever be suspected of me; I would advise people to account for it in this manner.

What suits or squares *exactly* to any one person, *not much* out of the *common* way; will fit a *great number* of *others* *indifferently well*. "What I hear has indeed a distant resemblance to *me*; as well as to a *croud* of *others*. — The *speaker* certainly *sat* to, and describes *himself*. — And what an odious and contemptible figure does he make? — "I will bear with nothing in *myself* that in "any respect resembles *him*.

A fault *common* among us, and of the *first* size seems to be that the *aim* or end of our actions is not such, as it ought to be. 'Tis prejudice, 'tis passion, 'tis mere whim or fancy, 'tis custom, 'tis fashion, 'tis a regard to reputation, to health, to ease, to present convenience and advantage, and not a sincere desire to serve our *great* and *good* God, that is the *chief* motive to most even of the *very best* things perhaps, that we do.

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— But now *Christians* have no encouragement to expect a *kind* acceptance and reward of any thing done from any *other* motive, than a principle of *love* and *obedience* to God and Christ : as they have been assured nothing, done with this view, will be *overlooked* or disregarded. — This then should make us look about us ; and see that a sincere design to please and obey God, *be made*, if it be not already, the chief and governing principle of *all* our actions, of any consequence or importance.

A vicious and *faulty modesty*, as to things serious and *sacred*, seems likewise to deserve reproof. We are *afraid* or ashamed to *own*, and study and endeavour all we can to stifle and *suppress* the sentiments of piety and virtue, of religion and devotion we actually *feel* ; and affect to be thought *less* strict and good, than we *really* are. — This may be *thought*, it may be *call'd modesty* or humility ; but it certainly is *vain-glory*, as well as the very *worst* of hypocrisy. We judge virtue and religion *disreputable* ; and therefore would have the *credit* of looseness and irreligion,

ligion, though we have no *just* title to them.

The truth is, *strong expressions* of piety and sanctity have been so *often* and *shamefully* abused, to the worst and basest of purposes, that they are by *many* thought to portend *weakness* or *ill design*; and the character of these is what *every one* would shun.

But it is not the *opinion* of the *many*, but of the *wise* and *good* that is worth regarding: and with these piety and virtue, *decently expressed*, will never be *reproachful*, nor *suspicious*. — But suppose it otherwise. Is it *reputation*? is it the good opinion and *applause* of *men*, — and not the approbation and *favour* of *God*, that we aim at? — Let us remember what the great *founder* of our religion, and the *judge* of mankind, who is *truth itself*, has solemnly assured us of. “If any man be ashamed
“ of me, and of my words, or doctrine;
“ of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed,
“ when he cometh in the glory of the Father, and of his holy angels.” — Let us
not

not then be *ashamed*, when it so *nearly* concerneth our soul. For as there is a *shame*, that bringeth *sin*; so there is a *shame* too, that is *glory* and *grace*.

Again. The *true end* of *frequenting religious assemblies* is to worship God in Spirit, and in truth; and to honour him, as we are able, both with our bodies, and minds: and the word of God, there read and preached, should be attended to with *diligence*; received with *meekness* and *temper*; applied with *honesty*; retained with watchfulness and *care*; and practised with *fidelity* and *constancy*.—— To *commend*, or to *censure* the *reader* or the *speaker*, may serve to shew *sound judgement*; *large reading*; *much piety*; *great kindness* and *candor*; *uncommon good-breeding* and *complaisance*; or *very different* qualities, as it may happen: but falls, it should be remembered, *quite beside* the *intention* of such meetings; which is purely to *glorify* God, and *benefit* or *improve mankind*.

We at times appear *public-spirited* to a very great *fault*. Other people's miscarriages

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take up so much of our time and care; that we quite forget to correct *our own*. — *Our own* practices and behavior, as well as *other* people's, must be regulated by, and conformed to the precepts of our religion, or we fail of our *duty here*; and shall fall short of our *reward hereafter*. — Charity though it should not *end*, ought most certainly to *begin at home*. — Let us then, if we have not hitherto *been*, for the future *become*, so *selfish*, as to regard and consult our *own* amendment and improvement *first*; our *neighbours next*.

Another thing that lies open to reproof, and deserves to be animadverted upon and corrected, at *this* time especially, is that we are over and above forward and liberal, as in our censures of *one another*, so particularly of *our governors*. — The practice, though *common*, is ungenerous, unchristian, inhuman; and has often had the *worst* of consequences, by bringing contempt upon the *persons*, — weakening the *hands*, — and utterly subverting the *government* of the very *best* of Princes,

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We see but the *outside* of things; and for want of a *full* view of matters are often *loudest* in our *censures*, where we should be *largest* in our *praises*.—But suppose some measures *not* the *best*; but *faulty*, and *manifestly* so: princes are *men*; and of course have a right to all *equitable* allowances. — Nay and if we consider how they are surrounded on all hands with *wealth*; with *grandeur*; with *power*; with temptations to *pleasure*; and, above all, —with FLATTERERS, —ready perhaps to gratify and please at *all* events, and at *times* possibly *paid for misrepresenting* and misleading; and yet that these are the people whose *reports*, and *advice* too, they are *many* times under a kind of necessity of taking, or being set down by: ——— we shall see that the greatest caution and *candor* in censuring their actions is *seasonable*, is *proper*; nay, and if we will be *equal*, is *necessary* too.

Whatever then our *abilities may be*, it certainly is our *part* or province not to dictate to, or direct our *governors*; not to blaspheme, malign, revile, or censure their *persons*, their *ministers*, or their *measures*;

but to *obey*, *honour*, and *support* them to the best of our power. There are, I doubt not, people *exceedingly sanguine* in their opposition to *persons* and *measures*, who are *sincerely* attached to the *true* interests of their King and country; and would not *adversely* do any thing that might *hurt* either the *one*, or the *other*. But care is to be taken, that matters be not carried *too far*. Things often have consequences, that we are not *well* aware of. Opposition may be *in*, it may be *out of* season: it may be *well*, it may be *ill judged* and *expressed*: it may be *highly useful*; it may be *extremely hurtful*. *Princes* are often *wounded deep*, when particular *measures*, or *ministers* were struck at. People that wish well to their King and country should therefore be *exceeding cautious* and *sparing* in their censures, at times especially when they *demand*, *deserve*, and should by all means *have* or *employ* our *best* endeavors to *succor*, and *support*: and *such* the *present* must, by all *equal* judges at least, be allowed to be.

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Once more. To *wish*, to *consult*, to *do* all the *good* we can to all mankind without exception; and *no harm* to any one, though he may have used us ever so *ungenerously*, so *unkindly*, or *injuriously*; and it might be done with the utmost *secrecy* and *safety*, — is one of the *first* or chief commandments in the *christian* law.—This probably is a point, that will, if we are *true* to ourselves, make a *great article* amongst the things to be condemned and corrected. For who is there of us all whose *breast* cannot, in some degree or other, reproach him upon this head? Suppose there be nothing *amiss* in our *hands*; yet who is he that hath not slipped with his *tongue*? or at least that has not offended, *one time* or *other*, in his *heart* — as to *this* particular?

To conclude. Whatever it be that upon a careful inquiry appears *amiss* in any of us, be it *condemned*; be it *repented* of; be it *amended*! — So shall we make a *wise* improvement of *this* day's solemnity: — obtain the pardon of *our own sins*, — and take a likely method to render our prayers
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effectual, for averting any heavy judgments that our manifold provocations may have deserved; and for procuring the divine blessing on his Majesty's arms and endeavours: that so they may soon be happily instrumental in restoring and perpetuating peace, safety, and prosperity to HIMSELF, His FAMILY, and these KINGDOMS.

F I N I S.

